

Interpretation of Female Tragedy Semiotics in the *White Deer Plain*—Take Tian Xiao'e as a Case

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In the novel *White Deer Plain*, Chen Zhongshi profoundly narrated the tragic fate of the survival of the image of Chinese women, revealed the social status, inner world and character characteristics of women in Chinese traditional culture, and explained the tragic root of the survival of Chinese women from the Chinese cultural level. About the description of the characters, Tian Xiao'e was deeper to touch the depths of human nature affection Aaron and reason of conflict, touched the moral self and human self in a culture of conflict, so that the survival of female tragic signs of the novel has a wider significance and general significance. In this article, the author takes Tian Xiao'e as the example, to analyze this typical characteristic from the angle of the female tragedy semiotics in multi-dimensional interpretation of the characters. It is not only has practical significance for gender ethics construction, also has the vital significance to our mind world and the cultural construction today.

Keywords: *White Deer Plain*, Tian Xiao'e, female tragedy signs

Introduction

Chen Zhongshi once said that when writing the role of Tian Xiao'e, he was deeply shocked when reviewing the *Lantian County Chronicles* in the face of the voluminous deeds and names of the virgins and fierce women. During the reading of the dense surnames on the book, he produced a completely contrary and even vicious idea. A character who completely deviated from feudal ethics and morality, at this time, Tian Xiao'e appeared in his mind. The author mentioned that in the feudal society, the list of female role models in morality is a kind of destruction and repression of women. He wants to create characters who think that they are purely human instincts in the novel (Chen, 2017). Standards of Chinese traditional ethics in strict requirements with women, female's autonomy are neglected. In the *White Deer Plain*, the dross of Chinese traditional social taboos and regulations did not disappear. However, with the change of time, the strong restraint suppresses the publicity of

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female's normal desires and the pursuit of ideal and happy life. There is a serious conflict between this traditional human theory and human instinct. Tian Xiao'e, the most rebellious bottom woman in *White Deer Plain*, in order to gain female subjectivity and to be able to control her body freely, she became a rebel in the feudal ethics system. Use your own body as a weapon against feudal ideas and systems (Han, 2018). Therefore, Tian Xiao'e is almost a woman who rebelled against the traditional moral code. Her instinctive love and sex represent the resistance to the feudal system and the desire and liberation of sex. This article analyzes and interprets Tian Xiao'e, an important character, from the new perspective of semiotics.

In the first section, Tian Xiao'e's female signs would be analyzed. From the novel's description of the dress and people around the description of Tian Xiao'e to analyze her female signs. In the second part, the turning point of Tian Xiao'e's tragic sign would be discussed from her three turning points to show her tragic signs. Then the last part would argue the signs of female tragedy based on Kristeva's female theory to reveal the gender equality between China and Western countries.

Analysis of Tian Xiao'e's Female Signs

In this article, the author will analyze Tian Xiao'e from the perspective of spirit signs and material signs. Specifically, first of all, the material sign as an external sign is reflected in the social hierarchy of Tian Xiao'e, the concubine of Guo Juren, who is described in the novel: "she combed her hair at the window, and her black and greasy hair was gathered from her shoulders to her chest, like a shiny black satin. When the little woman holds the comb from the top of her head, her wide sleeves are pulled back from her shoulder blades to reveal her pink-and-white arms..." (Chen, 1997, p. 128). From this description, it can be seen that Tian Xiao'e dressed as Guo Juren's concubine revealed her social status signs. Guo Juren was a big family and owned big fortune in the society at the time. Tian Xiao'e's father is a poor and talented person. Her father married the young and beautiful Tian Xiao'e to Guo Juren in his seventies, in order to let Tian Xiao'e live a life without worrying about food and clothing. But his father's behavior completely ignored Tian Xiao'e's inner desire and pursuit of love. In addition, Due to the unequal status between Tian Xiao'e and Guo Juren's marriage, she not only had to use his body to soak the dates for Guo Juren's tonic, it was a humiliation for Tian Xiao'e, but also had to endure the oppression of the hierarchy to herself. As the novel described, the eldest woman set strict laws for Guo Juren, and enters her room every month on the 1st day, the 11th day, and the 21st day. The materialized relationship between husband and concubine, and the unequal status of wife and concubine planted seeds of resistance in Tian Xiao'e's heart.

Tian Xiao's spiritual sign, that is, the inner symbol, is reflected in her indulgence of sex and the pursuit of love. She is interspersed with love with Hei Wa, incest with Lu Zilin and adultery with Bai Xiaowen. In the novel, Tian Xiao'e was the wife of Guo Juren's second wife originally. Because she couldn't bear to be a tool for Guo Juren's tools to vent libido, she seduce Hei Wa privately and fall in loved with Hei Wa by sex. As a woman, she needs to be loved and needs natural love. She wants her to be healthy and responsible. She wants to love her partner who is healthy and responsible. In the face of Hei Wa, she disregarded the imprisonment of etiquette, sincerely fell in love with him, and germinated her initial desire for love and freedom. The writer wrote in the novel, "I think we secretly eloped and ran to a far place, even if I begged for food and drink, I wouldn't be too bothered, as long as you were with me day and night..." (Chen, 1997, p. 139).

As an ordinary woman, Tian Xiao'e did not really have many requirements. She also wants to have her own family, her own house and land like others, and live the ordinary days of sunrise and sunset just like ordinary people. However, even such a simple goal is like a mirage in a male-dominated society where women cannot control their own destiny. Facing such a fate, Tian Xiao'e had no choice but to resist. She used her life as a bet in exchange for the freedom of her sexuality and for the dignity of her individual survival. At this point, we say that human nature's needs are the most fundamental reason why people are tempted by sex. People love each other for the sake of fulfilling their individual personalities, which is another reason for sexual attraction. Here, people put their own spirit, morality and pursuit into the sex, so that the premise of the existence of sex is the creation of the spirit.

The Turning Point of Tian Xiaoe's Tragic signs

The first turning point of Tian Xiaoe's tragic sign: when Hei Wa appeared, she met her true love. She was forced to be Guo Juren's errand, and in Guo Juren's eyes, she was just a health tool that used the lower body to replenish her body and a tool to relieve his desire when he was happy. She did not have the basic human dignity, rights and dignity of herself as a person, but just a sex slave who is "not as good as a dog". But she was not satisfied with this situation herself. "The mention of the red dates is like a cone." She threw the red dates into the urinal to resist. Although it was a revenge, it also reflected her value. Later, she met with Hei Wa and they are carry on a clandestine love affair, despite with excessively sensual color, but it is the resistance with the weapon of sex, concentrated strongly to show the awakening of her consciousness. At the beginning, Xiao'e and Hei Wa is to satisfy the sexual hunger with each other, is in accordance with human nature and humanity, and in the whole process, she did not abandon him, willing to live the hard life with Hei Wa. It can be seen that what she pursues is not comfort life, but just to obtain the minimum right to live as a human being, and to be a legitimate daughter-in-law in a farming court. It reflects her spirit sign. Through this character, he accused the ethical principles of hypocrisy and cannibalism, praised the awakening of the oppressed person's dignity, good humanity, and resistance consciousness, and exposes the evil forces that destroy the beautiful ideal in politics, personality and body. In this regard, these sexual psychology and sexual behaviors are rich in deep cultural connotations, and contain ancient and fresh anti-feudal significance, which can trigger our profound cultural thinking.

The second turning point of tragic sign was appeared after He Wa and Tian Xiao'e's elopement, Hei Wa fled back to the White Deer Village, although people do not allow her to such a person, she also enjoyed the pursuit of personal freedom and happiness and the realization of the joy. She regardless of fame and wealth, do not follow the custom, as long as she knows each other and loves each other, she will pay her attention to it. Hei Wa took Tian Xiao'e into the Bai Family Ancestral Hall. As the patriarch Bai Jiaxuan asked Tian Xiaoe's origin, he did not allow Tian Xiao'e to enter the ancestral hall. As an adulterous woman, she has no right to enter the ancestral hall of the Bai family and recognize the ancestor together with Hei Wa. She didn't even have a chance to say "Daddy" to her father-in-law—Lu San. Calling Lu San daddy is a kind of recognition of her status as the daughter-in-law of the deer family. It is a prerequisite for her to enter the patriarchal clan and obtain a normal survival status. She is eager to call her father-in-law a daddy throughout her life. This is a symbol of the acceptance of identity and social roles. However, even this little hope she could not be realized, He Wa fled, she fell into the wolf's nest like a lamb. She was helpless. The second turning point of tragic sign was companied with

the tragic events. Tian Tian Xiao'e helped Lu Zilin seduce and frame Bai Xiaowen, with the purpose of retaliating against the Bai family, committing adultery with Lu Zilin, sexual indulgence, and then sucking opium with Bai Xiaowen, completely falling into the abyss of life. She became the play object of Lu Zilin, the society abandoned her, and she began to tease the society. After she went to the fallen abyss and listened to Lu Zulin's instructions to seduce Bai Xiaowen, she did not have the joy of revenge, but instead had sympathy and love. Since then, Tian Xiao'e began her short and tragic life.

The third tragic symbolic turn is Tian Xiao'e's death. In order to maintain the benevolence and morality represented by Bai Jiaxuan, Lu San killed Tian Xiao'e with his own hands. Before she died, she called out in surprise and mournfully, Ah ... father! Tian Xiao'e's scream ended the dissolute life rejected by the patriarchal culture, which was the last cry in her life. Lu San went crazy after killing Tian Xiao'e. Through Lu San's mouth, Tian Xiao'e, who died in the novel, expressed his grievances. Indeed, Tian Xiao'e does not steal or snatch, respects the elders and friendly children, but the people of White Deer Village are unwilling to get along with her. Even if she and Hei Wa really love each other, don't want money, and want to live a good life with Hei Wa, but at that time, people in White Deer Village saw this relationship as shameful and scornful. White Deer Villagers cannot tolerate the existence of such a slutty woman, and the Bai family can't stand the shame that Tian Xiao'e has brought to his family. All the evils will be borne by this helpless and weak woman, Tian Xiao'e pointed out. In order to protect the owner's self-esteem, Lu San ended Tian Xiao'e's life personally. The third tragedy sign ended with Tian Xiao'e's death. After Tian Xiao'e's death, the story line about her is not over yet. Bai Jiaxuan suppressed Tian Xiao'e's corpse under the tower he built, so that she will never be able to live forever and no longer harm others. It can be said that Tian Xiao's tragic sign reflects the absurdity of the entire patriarchal society.

Analysis of Female Tragic Signs

From the perspective of the development process of the female liberation movement, the second wave of feminist movements based on the elimination of gender differences, criticism of sexism and male power was launched in the 1960s and 1970s (Ye, 2006). When she visited China with the French delegation in 1976, Kristeva came to Huyi County, a county 40 kilometers away from Xi'an, where she personally contacted and visited some Chinese women, and then conducted a series of Chinese women sketching. Yang Chunfang (2016) mentioned that Kristeva's perception of China and Chinese women is a mixture of deep thoughts and superficial views, rational thoughts and perceptual views. Although there are certain limitations, her unprecedented interpretation and writing of female explicit or implicit subjectivity in traditional Chinese culture and the female liberation movement possessed by contemporary Chinese women are undoubtedly creative and active. The historical status of Chinese women and reflection on the output of contemporary Chinese female images have certain enlightenment and reference significance.

According to the definition of patriarchy in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2020), "patriarchy, hypothetical social system in which the father or a male elder has absolute authority over the family group; by extension, one or more men (as in a council) exert absolute authority over the community as a whole." The sociologist Allan Johnson (1997, pp. 28-29) said that "patriarchal culture values 'control and domination' most, because control and domination of other men ensures one's own safety from them." Some scholars described that Patriarchy is the

power of the father. The patriarchy refers to a family—a social, ideological, and political system. In this system, men use power and direct oppression, or through rituals, traditions, laws, language.

By examining the history of the Chinese family and the fate of Chinese women, Kristeva attempts to explore another form of relationship between men and women. This gender relationship, in her opinion, determines the ethical belief, religious family power and so on, and constitutes the expression form of power in the whole society. When Kristeva explains the traditions of Chinese women's families and the revolutionary environment in China at that time, she has envisioned an ideal Chinese maternal order. In this kind of order, negative pleasure (jouissance) in its core position, completely heterogeneous with the western world. She (Kristeva, 2010) regards the relationship between men and women in China as a dialogue between Yin and Yang, believing that there is no opposition between the masculine and feminine in China, but only a mutual relationship and positive interaction, and that the relationship between males and females in China is permeable. Her understanding of gender relations in China reflects her desire for a balanced relationship in western society (Zhang, 2016). Kristeva keenly captures the social culture dominated by patriarchy in traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the repression of women and the resistance to symbolic order are the focus of Chinese women (Zhang, 2015). For thousands of years, Chinese women have not understood how to resist, they have been reluctant to accept it, and have lived reluctantly under the authority of patriarchy (Zhang, 2018). Tian Xiao'e, a novel character created by Chen Zhongshi, wrote a song of rebellion under the patriarchal discourse system. She bravely pursued her dream of a better life, and she has a strong sense of resistance (Gao, 2019). This is also the awakening aspect of Chinese female consciousness written by Chen Zhongshi. The female tragic sign has shaped a vivid character. From the tragic character, the spirit of resistance of Tian Xiao'e against the patriarchy and feudal ethics.

Conclusion

Although Tian Xiao'e, created by Chen Zhongshi, ended his life with a tragic sign, the new female image he created left a deep impression on readers. No one will understand and respect her feelings of survival for her sake. From her father to the irrelevant people around her, they judge her moral values on the basis of patriarchy, thus fundamentally rejecting what this woman has done. In this cultural atmosphere, she carries the stigma no longer is a normal person, even though her heart still deep feeling and yearning for the traditional moral personality, and practice in daily life, but not pure sexual behavior will only make her sad and lonely life in the edge of the world of traditional culture, until they are removed from the industry. This is exactly the universal tragic survival fate that Chinese women have to face in the traditional cultural context.

In a word, the female survival narrative in the *White Deer Plain* shows the tragedy of female survival in the context of Chinese traditional culture, dominated by the inherent paradox of culture itself, and reveals the collective unconscious formed by this tragedy as a cultural tragedy. The deep-rooted contempt for women formed by this collective unconsciousness is also deeply exist in today's modern society. Therefore, this tragic narrative of female survival is of great significance to our spiritual world and cultural construction today.

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